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Matthew A. Bille, Editor

NEW SPECIES OF THE MONTH: THE PERUVIAN BEAKED WHALE

If any order of sea creatures should have been completely catalogued by now, it is the whales. After all, these mammals are generally large and must come to the surface periodically, announcing their presence with a conspicuous spout of exhaled air. Moreover, they have been hunted intensively all over the world.

Despite this, some members of the order *Cetacea* have avoided science until recently. Most of these belong to the reclusive, deep-diving family known as the beaked whales. Most beaked whales have dark-colored upper bodies with pale undersides. They are distinguished by long, dolphin-like snouts, which in most types contain only two functional teeth. The placement and shape of these teeth are a major criteria for classification.

The Indopacific beaked whale (*Mesoplodon pacificus*) is known only from two skulls washed ashore thousands of miles and twenty-nine years apart. The skulls, obtained from Australia in 1926 and Somalia in 1955, display two very small teeth at the very tip of the lower jaw. Some authorities place this whale in its own genus, *Indopacetus*, although the *Mesoplodon* identification predominates. It seems a bit premature to conclude the matter when no one has ever examined or even seen the whole animal, alive or dead. Dr. Lyall Watson, in his *Sea Guide to Whales of the World*, suggests that a large pod of beaked whales photographed near Christmas Island may belong to this species. He makes the same suggestion concerning brown whales reported in the Gulf of Aden by Captain Willem F. J. Morzer Bruyns, although that witness was certain he was seeing a new type of orca (*Orcinus sp?*) (See *Newsletter* V.1, #5.) Finally, *Walker's Mammals of the World* notes that recent sightings in the Eastern Pacific may represent this whale, but no one can be certain.

PERUVIAN BEAKED WHALE (Continued):

The Tasman whale, or Shepherd's beaked whale (*Tasmacetus shepherdi*), was unheard of until a 1933 stranding. Subsequent strandings have given us all our meager data on this whale, which reaches at least 22 feet in length. One possible sighting from New Zealand in 1964 represents the only report of the living animal.

Andrews' beaked whale (*Mesoplodon bowdoini*) is known only from remains washed up on South Pacific Shores. Another beaked whale, Hector's, was described from a few strandings. A photograph taken off Catalina Island in 1976 apparently documents the first live sighting ever of this species, *M. hectori*.

The ginkgo-toothed whale (*Mesoplodon ginkgodens*), up to sixteen feet long and weighing over 3,000 pounds, was first encountered in 1957. The name of this black-and-gray denizen of the North Pacific derives from the unusual leaf-like shape of the two teeth. The story of its discovery is unique, if not very flattering to the human race. The first known example wandered into shallow water off Tokyo's Oiso Beach. Japanese boys playing baseball on the sand waded into the water and beat the animal to death with their bats. Fortunately, the carcass was saved for science, and a formal description was published in 1958.

The stoutly built arch-beaked whale, or Hubbs' beaked whale, (*Mesoplodon carlhubbsi*) was introduced to science when a specimen washed ashore in Washington state on November 2, 1944. After a long period in which it was confused with the Bering sea beaked whale (*M. stejnegeri*), the arch-beaked was finally identified by Dr. Joseph Moore in 1963. The two six-inch teeth in its white snout are prominently displayed even when the jaw is closed.

The smallest and most recently discovered beaked whale is the Peruvian. Scientists had no inkling of its existence until 1976, when Dr. James Mead found its decaying skull on a beach in Peru. Mead realized the skull was from an unknown type of whale, and he immediately began a search for better specimens. This took quite a while. It is the adult male whose teeth are used to distinguish one beaked whale from another, and it wasn't until 1988 that Mead obtained such a specimen.

By the time Mead formally published his description of *Mesoplodon peruvians* in 1991, Peruvian scientists and fishermen had helped him assemble a total of eleven specimens. All were found either washed up on shore or trapped in fishing nets.

The largest example was only twelve feet long, so it's not surprising that the Peruvian is also referred to as the pygmy beaked whale. There have been no scientific observations of the living whale, so its range, habits, and population size remain unknown.

PERUVIAN BEAKED WHALE (Continued):

SOURCES: Anonymous. 1991. "Shy Leviathan," *Discover*, November // Baker, Mary L. 1987. *Whales, Dolphins, and Porpoises of the World* // Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Co. // Ellis, Richard. 1980. *The Book of Whales*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf // Leatherwood, Stephen, and Randall R. Reeves. 1983. *The Sierra Club Handbook of Whales and Dolphins*. San Francisco: Sierra Club Books // Mead, James G., and Roger S. Payne. 1975. "A Specimen of the Tasman Beaked Whale, *Tasmacetus Shepherdi*, From Argentina," *Journal of Mammology*, February // Nowack, Ronald M. 1991. *Walker's Mammals of the World*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press // Ralls, Katherine, and Robert L. Brownell, Jr. 1991. "A whale of a new species," *Nature*, April 18 // Watkins, W. A. 1976. "A Probable Sighting of a live *Tasmacetus Shepherdi* in New Zealand Waters," *Journal of Mammology*, May // Watson, Lyall. 1981. *Sea Guide to Whales of the World*. New York: E.P. Dutton.

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO... THE TAKAHE

No place on Earth boasts a greater variety of bird life than New Zealand. With no native mammals, New Zealand's birds sprouted into a myriad of types filling every ecological niche. Even today, this avian kingdom may not have revealed all its secrets.

There are three known species of New Zealand's signature bird, the comical featherball called the kiwi. Maori lore includes a fourth, much larger, species of kiwi, the roa-roa. It is unknown to science, but there is a cloak of kiwi-like feathers which are much larger than those of known kiwis.

The takahe was another flightless bird. It was turkey-sized and boasted striking red, green and blue feathers. It, too, was considered extinct by the time Europeans settled New Zealand. Only fossils were known.

Accordingly, the shooting of a takahe in 1849 was a startling event. It took place on Resolution Island, which is just off the coast of South Island. The bird was not seen again until two years later, when a second specimen was taken on another island.

The takahe then disappeared again, this time for 28 years. Then another one was killed, this time on the mainland of South Island. Incredibly, the bird dropped from sight a third time, until a lone takahe was caught in 1898. Once more the takahe was crossed off the extinct list, then scribbled in again when no one could find another specimen.

It wasn't until 1948 that the takahe defiantly reappeared. In an isolated valley of South Island's Murchison Mountains, Dr. Geoffrey Orbell, a physician with a fascination concerning the missing bird, led an expedition that netted two takahes. Orbell discovered that previous searchers had overlooked a population numbering at least ninety birds!

TAKAHE (Continued):

Today, the takahe continues its comeback. Wildlife Service workers are trying to eradicate New Zealand's introduced population of egg-eating stoats. With this assistance, plus a protected reserve and a captive breeding program, the takahe population has steadily increased. If ever a species showed how resilient nature can be, it is this unique bird, which is a bust in the flying department but certainly knows how to hide.

SOURCES: Anonymous. 1977. "Takahe Rallies," *Oryx*, December // Caras, Roger A. 1966. *Last Chance on Earth.* Philadelphia: Chilton Book // Fuller, Errol. 1987. *Extinct Birds.* New York: Facts on File // Kanze, Edward. 1992. *Notes From New Zealand.* New York: Henry Holt & Co.

UNCLASSIFIED: STELLER'S SEA MONKEY

Georg Wilhelm Steller, the great early naturalist who discovered Steller's sea cow, left us a puzzle. Among the numerous Arctic animals and plants he described, all but one have been classified. That exception is what Steller called the "marine ape" or "sea monkey."

The naturalist reported encountering this seagoing mammal on August 10, 1774, south of the Alaskan peninsula. He observed it for two hours, sometimes so closely he "could have touched it with a pole." It was almost five feet long, with fur predominantly the color of "a chestnut cow" and a doglike head with prominent whiskers and erect ears. Steller did not notice any front flippers, but thought he could discern a tail shaped like a shark's as the animal cavorted about his boat in a manner that seemed inquisitive and almost friendly. Sometimes it played with a unique-looking piece of seaweed, which Steller also described in detail and which is now a well-known species.

The encounter ended when Steller decided to obtain the "very unusual and unknown sea animal" by shooting it. He missed, and the animal departed in haste. The creature was seen several more times, but always at a distance.

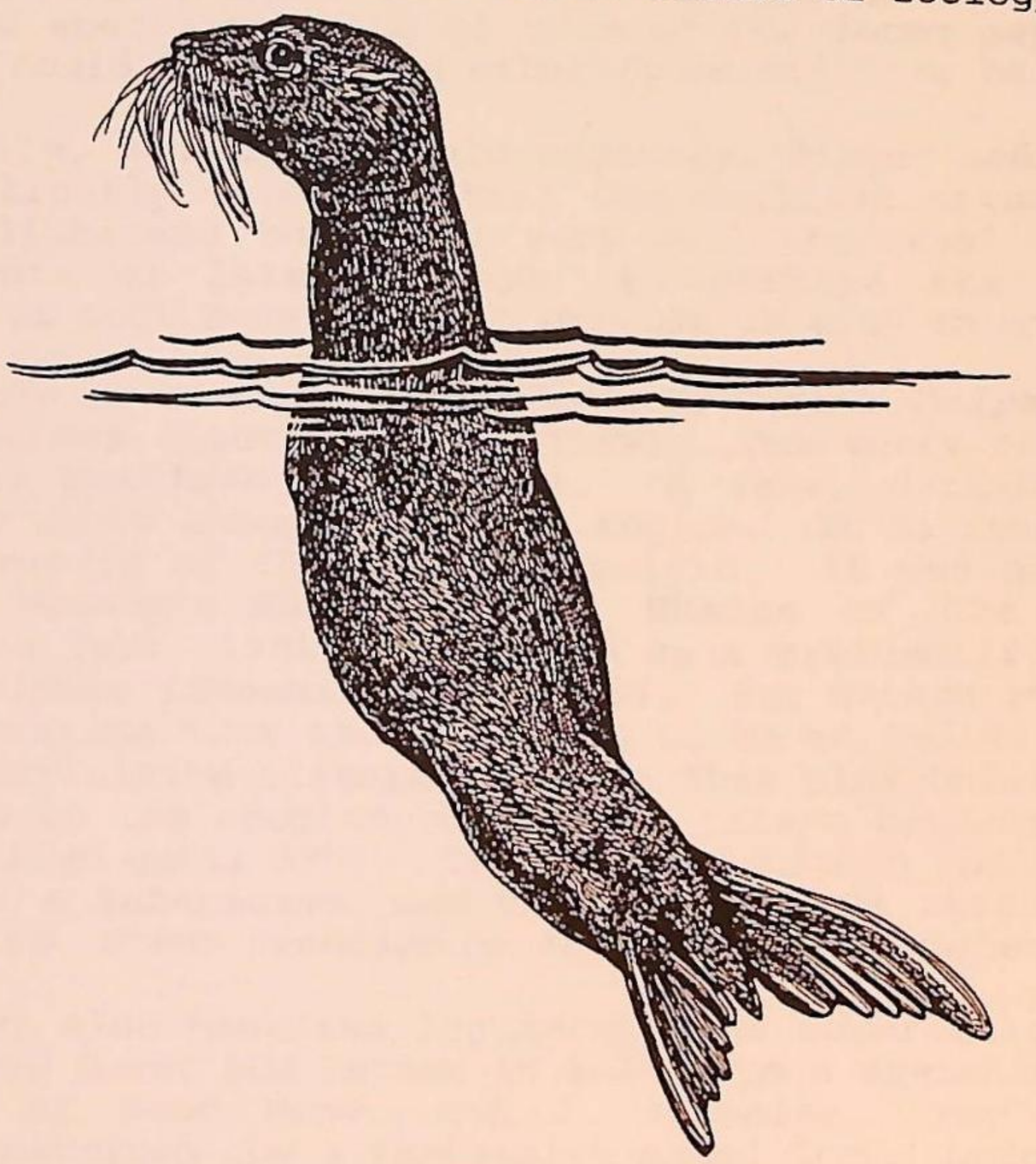
Steller called the animal a "sea monkey" because it reminded him of some descriptions by that name in a bestiary written two centuries before by Konrad von Gesner. (Textbooks were rare in those days, and could stay in use long after the author died or after subsequent discoveries should have invalidated them.) But what was this creature? If the description is accurate (and Steller was a meticulous observer), it rules out all known seals and sea lions. In fact, it rules out every known animal, living or extinct.

STELLER'S SEA MONKEY (Continued):

Steller's chief biographer, Leonhard Stejneger, thought the sea monkey was a fur seal. He noted that Steller, up to this time, had probably never seen a fur seal. However, Steller later studied, dissected, and wrote in exhaustive and precise detail about fur seals and sea lions (not to mention eating them), without ever noting that either one resembled the sea monkey.

Biologist Roy Mackal, in his book *Searching for Hidden Animals*, suggests the sea monkey was a young specimen of an unclassified long-necked, predatory Arctic seal. This animal would be a counterpart to the sinuous, aggressive leopard seal of the Antarctic. The leopard seal tucks its front fins against its body when swimming and does display very inquisitive behavior. The sharklike tail is a problem, although seals can hold their rear flippers together in a way that looks like such a tail.

Evidence for an unknown seal's existence in the Arctic is limited to a few reports, plus Inuit traditions. Nevertheless, there is no way to dismiss an observer of Steller's prominence. Whether the creature he saw is now extinct or still awaiting discovery, it remains a first-class riddle of zoology.



The sea monkey, based on Steller's description. Reconstruction by Craig Gosling, copyright 1994. All rights reserved.

STELLER'S SEA MONKEY (Continued):
SOURCES: Bright, Michael. 1989. *There Are Giants in the Sea.* London: Robson Books // Goodwin, George C. 1946. "The End of the Great Northern Sea Cow," *Natural History,* February // Mackal, Roy. 1980. *Searching for Hidden Animals.* New York: Doubleday // Stejneger, Leonhard. 1936. *Georg Wilhelm Steller.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

FROM THE ARCHIVES: CETACEAN PUZZLES

"From the Archives" is a new feature browsing through published material that may be of cryptozoological interest. In this issue, let's follow up on the beaked whale article by looking at what else some authors have said about the vexing problem of classifying cetaceans. For example, Nigel Bonner's ***Whales of the World*** (Facts on File, New York, 1989) notes that **Byrde's whale** (*Balenoptera edeni*) was only recognized in 1913, and it may consist of two species. Larger specimens of this 12- to 14-meter long whale might belong to a separate species, *B. byrdei*. Also disputed is whether the **southern right whale** is a species, *Balaena australis*, or only a variant of *B. glacialis*. Bonner notes that the 6-meter pygmy right whale (*Caperea marginata*) wasn't seen alive until the 1960s. On the beaked whales, Bonner adds, "The specific status of some of the forms may be uncertain and there could certainly be other forms still to be described."

Finally, concerning whale ancestry, Bonner adds (with tongue perhaps slightly in cheek) that the earliest archaeocetes still had four limbs and "would fit very well the usual description of sea-serpents or lake monsters, so perhaps the indefatigable searchers of Loch Ness will yet provide us with an archaeocete."

We move on to David J. Coffey's 1977 book ***Dolphins, Whales, and Porpoises*** (Macmillan, New York). One entry reads, "*Stenella graffmani*: **Graffman's porpoise**. A rare, dark-bodied species with white spots along its dorsal region. It is restricted to the tropical waters of the Eastern Pacific. It was named in 1934." Dr. Lyall Watson's ***Sea Guide to Whales of the World*** (E. P. Dutton, New York, 1981) lists this as a misidentification of the bridled dolphin (*Stenella attenuata*). But Watson reports his own mystery, stating that there appears to be an Indian Ocean dolphin awaiting definitive classification. This pink-bellied animal may be related to the roughtooth dolphin (*Steno bredanensis*), itself not classified until 1955. The mystery dolphin could be a related species or a subspecies, and may also be the cetacean variously described as *Steno perniger* or *Stenopontistes zambezicus*.

Coffey also mentions *Lagenorhynchus supercilious*, a dolphin described by Gamot and Lesson in 1826 from a skeleton washed up on the Cape of Good Hope, and *L. thicolea*, Gray's white-sided dolphin, described (by a taxonomist named Gray, naturally) in 1849 from a single skull. *L. superciliosus* is sometimes believed to be cospecific with the dusky dolphin, *L. obscurus* (another one

CETACEAN PUZZLES (Continued):

described by Gray), which itself is in need of better definition.

These are only some of the species descriptions which have faded into obscurity or been absorbed into other types. Are all of them mistakes, or do any early descriptions actually concern true species which have been missing for all these years?

NEWS AND COMMENT

There are **600 species of mollusks discovered** (or rediscovered from old specimens) every year. These are added to the 100,000 or so species now known. **Source:** Wilson, Craig. 1994. "Presiding over a shrine to seashells," *USA Today*, September 28, p.1D.

Researcher Margaret Lowman, climbing through the forest canopy in Belize, has discovered a **new species of spider** with an amazing ability to "shoot" its prey. The spider grasps a thread of its web, pulls it back like a bowstring, and then "snaps" it at a passing insect. **Source:** Roach, Mary. 1994. "Aliens in the Treetops," *International Wildlife*, November/December, p.6.

Another **unknown species of octopus** has been spotted. About 15 inches long and nearly transparent, the mollusc was sighted by the submersible Alvin 1,000 miles west of Guatemala at a depth of 12,000 feet. The animal caught the scientists' attention because it was attempting to mate with an octopus several times its size - and both were males. Scientist Janet Voight speculated that deep-sea octopuses meet so rarely that males will go for anything they bump into. **Source:** Friend, Tim. 1994. "Same-sex tendency, or rather, tentacles," *USA Today*, October 13, p.1D.

The *Chicago Tribune* (September 18, 1994), printed some more details on the **cougars reported in Vermont** (mentioned in Vol. 1, #5.) The cats were seen near the town of Craftsbury, in a rural, forested area in the northern part of the state, only 30 miles from the Canadian border. The sightings were confirmed when **droppings were collected and identified** by the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The director of wildlife for Vermont's Department of Fish and Wildlife, one Ronald Regan, was quoted as calling the sighting "exciting information." **Comment:** This editor agrees. After all, if we've missed a large cat in the U.S., what has been overlooked in more remote areas of the world? **Thanks to** reader John Cieciel for sending the *Tribune* article.

A minor media circus hovers over a **white buffalo calf** named "Miracle" from a Wisconsin farm. For some Native Americans, its birth was a sacred event. At this writing, though, its coat is turning dark on the face and legs. **Comment:** It's always worth noticing when any unusual color variant is observed, since some "unknown animal" reports are undoubtedly due to freak specimens of known creatures. (**Source:** *USA Today*, November 2, 1994.)

RESOURCES:

BOOKS.

McClung, Robert M. 1993. ***Lost Wild America.*** Hamden, CN: Linnet Books. A first-rate work, covering the history of extinctions and endangered species in and around the United States since the coming of Europeans. A wealth of data in this book (updated from a 1969 original) includes profiles of lost, rediscovered, and rare animals of all types, woven into a highly readable and informative chronological narrative and illustrated with numerous drawings. The final section on environmental policy betrays an annoyingly one-sided political correctness, but that's a minor complaint about a superb book. Thorough bibliography.

PERIODICALS.

Caile, Elizabeth. 1994. **"The Vanishing Tiger,"** *OMNI*, August, p.26. Article on the precarious status of the Siberian tiger, facing extinction in the wild. Gives advice for readers wishing to help the animal, including addresses of Russian officials.

Nobbe, George. 1994. **"Forget the Fins - This Caddy's Got a Flipper,"** *OMNI*, August, p.26. Roundup of news and research concerning "Caddy," the large unclassified sea animal believed to exist off the west coast of British Columbia. Notes there were five sightings in 1993 and that two scientists, Paul LeBlond and Ed Bousfield, are seriously pursuing the animal.

IN CLOSING:

All serious researchers who are not already members should join the International Society of Cryptozoology, which serves as a clearinghouse for information and labors to make searching for unknown or presumed-extinct animals a respectable scientific specialty. Contact J. Richard Greenwell, Secretary, ISC, P.O. Box 43070, Tucson, AZ 85733. While this editor is a member of the ISC, *Cryptozoology Newsletter* is not an official ISC publication. The ISC produces its own newsletter and the annual scholarly journal *Cryptozoology*. It also hosts an annual conference.

I welcome comments, corrections, or clippings. Responses to the editor may be directed to my new address at 809 S. Circle Dr., Apt. 1J, Colorado Springs, CO, 80910, USA. (This address is temporary: watch for another new one in the next issue.)

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